

U.S. Embassy Asmara Cautions Against Diversity Visa Scams

The U.S. Embassy in Asmara reminds Eritrean citizens and residents to use caution when working with private entities to apply for visas to the United States, as reports of fraudulent e-mails, websites, and print advertisements offering visa services are on the rise.

In particular, one widespread Diversity Visa (DV) scam e-mail instructs recipients to send money via Western Union to a fictitious person at the U.S. Embassy in London. If you have received this e-mail, you have been targeted by con artists. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES should money be sent to any address for participation in the DV Lottery. The Department of State's Kentucky Consular Center (KCC) does not send e-mail notification to DV entrants informing them of their winning entries. DV-2012 applicants will never receive correspondence containing information on an applicant's status, but will only receive notification directing them to check their status on the official website. The only official way to receive status updates is through the DV program website at www.dvlottery.state.gov.

Many private websites offer legitimate services to assist individuals in applying for visas, but some illegitimate entities claim to provide "visa services" as a cover for scams or identity theft. Some of these websites may attempt to charge a fee for providing forms and information about immigration procedures that are available to the public at no charge on the Department of State (www.state.gov) and travel.state.gov websites, or through the U.S. Embassy Asmara website.

Persons who wish to apply for U.S. visas should use caution before deciding to send via e-mail personal information such as credit card and bank account numbers. The only official way to register for the DV program is directly through the official U.S. Department of State website during the specified, limited-time registration period.

The DV program offers up to 55,000 visa slots annually for people who wish to apply for immigration to the United States. Applicants selected in the random drawing are notified by the U.S. Department of State and are provided with instructions on how to proceed to the next step in the process. No other organization or private company is authorized by the U.S. Department of State to notify DV program applicants of their winning entries or the next steps in the process of applying for their immigrant visas.

Successful DV-2011 applicants already have been notified by KCC by letter, not by e-mail. DV-2011 entrants also can check the status of their entries at <http://www.dvlottery.state.gov> until June 30, 2011. Entrants will not be asked to send money to the KCC or any U.S. embassy or consulate.

Entrants who completed the online DV-2012 entries will not receive notification letters from KCC. Rather, they must check the status of their entries themselves through the Entrant Status Check available at <http://www.dvlottery.state.gov> between May 1, 2011, and June 30, 2012.

To report incidents of visa fraud, please contact the Embassy Asmara via e-mail at ConsularAsmara@state.gov or via phone at 120-004 x2411, x2412 or x2415. Images of U.S. emblems such as flags, eagles, monuments, or official seals do not necessarily indicate a U.S. Government website. A domain name of ".gov" ensures that a website is a legitimate U.S. Government site where the information is free and up-to-date.

Complaints about unwanted e-mails that may be scams can be sent to the U.S. Department of Justice at www.usdoj.gov/spam.htm.